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ROYCE AS AN INTERPRETER OF AMERICAN IDEALS.

FROM the inception of the *JOURNAL OF ETHICS* to the day of his death, Professor Royce was a member of its editorial board. And the many articles and reviews that he contributed to its pages attest his interest in its field of activity. We are apt to think of Royce as primarily a metaphysician, only incidentally interested in ethical problems. This is a great mistake. The two dominant interests throughout his career were logic and ethics, and his metaphysical interests grew out of the latter. For he held that for morality to become effective through religion, it was necessary to "find one's ideal among the realities." It is in the critical discussion of the problem thus suggested that he is led to his earliest formulation of his metaphysical idealism in *The Religious Aspect of Philosophy*.

In the preface to that work he tells us that religious interests first drove him to philosophy. But what is unique in his case is that it was not the interest of the believer in finding support for his faith, but rather the interest of the rebel in winning through to a higher vision of values because of his very rebellion. Royce was by nature a non-conformist. He was proud of the tradition current in his family that one of his ancestors had stood by the scaffold of Charles I. Moreover, he was born and spent his early years in a small mining town in California, when the independent spirit of the early pioneers was still in evidence, and frontier lawlessness and vigilante committees still fresh in memory. Now the problem of freedom which lies back of our efforts in democracy stands out in bolder relief in the life of the frontier community than anywhere else. What is the price one must pay for freedom? How can the interests of the community be maintained and the independence of its individual members be preserved? Royce's two books and his many articles dealing with Cali-

fornia life show not only a deep interest in his native state, but especially his interest in the great practical problems that confront the American nation. His *History of California* bears as a sub-title "A Study of American Character." And it is clear that his interest in California was mainly due to the fact that there he found a fresh and vigorous expression of American character freed from the artificialities of convention, all its passions, its ambitions, its ideals,—both its virtues and its failings, its pettiness and its grandeur, writ large. And his ethical idealism is best understood as an interpretation of the spirit of modern civilization as it had found expression in his native land. Not that there was anything of the Chauvinist in Royce. If there were aught of value in our social and political ideals it was due to the fact that they rested on principles that cross the boundaries between nations, and might equally serve as the basis of that community of nations to which he hopefully looked forward.

Professor Royce's confidence in the so-called dialectic method of proof is well known. The only irrefragable truths, he held, are those that are implied in the very effort to deny them. This was not, however, a method borrowed from Hegel. The truth is, Royce was a born dialectician. It was a method suggested rather by the practical problems that he used to ponder over in the days of his youth: How one must surrender independence in order to gain freedom; what the dissenter must affirm in order to make good his dissent. It is only a step from this to the conviction that the road to certainty lies through doubt; to the discovery, in any serious defence of ethical skepticism the affirmation of a positive ideal, in the assertion of rights the implication of duties, in the existence of error the proof of the reality of God. It was his clear consciousness of the paradoxical aspect of all significant human experience that determined the method. Living near the concrete and vital facts of experience, he found that things were much more complex than abstract reason, or human wilfulness, would have them, and rediscovered the old truth that things

are not cut off from one another "as with a hatchet," and that "opposites unite."

We are concerned in this paper, however, not with the method itself, but rather with the use Royce made of it in dealing with the problem of ethics, with the ethical ideal to which he was led, and with the application of that ideal to certain vital problems of the hour.

The subjectivism latent in the Protestant reformation came out into the open in the doctrine of the rights of man in the period of the enlightenment, and reached its extreme expression in the latter part of the eighteenth, and the beginning of the nineteenth, century in the work of the Romantic philosophers, who, cut loose from all authority, would follow unhindered the dictates of the enlightened heart. But their work is mainly negative, its aim being to set the human subject free from the bondage of authority and tradition. For us, however, this aim is, in theory at least, already accomplished, and the intelligent man of to-day is earnestly seeking new ties that will bind him once more to his fellows and to the social order,—some method of reconciling the individual's heart and interest with the authority of the community.¹ If the moral law is not a finished code, delivered on Sinai, nor yet engraved on the tablets of the mind, neither is it to be found in any form of self-will.

What we nowadays want, in that loneliness of the inner life which, during our worse moments, we often feel so bitterly, is precisely this,—to learn to love authority, and to that end to find the authority that is worth loving. Hence our ethical inquirers, indeed, ask the old question of subjectivism, "Why should *I* obey the moral law?" But they ask not as the old romantic rebels asked, for the sake of escaping from any but the inner law. They ask longingly, just because the subject has learned, in his keen modern sensitiveness, to despise the merely inner law of his caprice, and because he wants to find the way back to an ethical order that can be verified in and through the world of hard facts,—an order that shall be external and still spiritual; an object of scientific experience, and still a kingdom of the ideal.²

¹ I am here summarizing the position taken by Professor Royce in an article entitled "The Outlook in Ethics," published in the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS, Vol. II, 1891-2.

² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Moreover, this is just the form that the perennial problem of freedom takes in modern civilization, and it is especially conspicuous in our own experiment in democracy. We want independence; we must have the unity that authority alone can insure. How are we to realize both? It is because Professor Royce saw this so clearly, and saw also what its solution implies, that we are justified in viewing his work as an interpretation of the spirit of American civilization. The law of freedom that we seek is "determined by the fact that there are many of us living together, and that, if we are rational beings, we are deeply concerned for one another,—concerned to comprehend one another, to respect one another, to organize our wills into some sort of universality, to live in spiritual union, to give our common life the most complete wholeness that is possible."³ In this way we may combine "the fullest regard for the 'independent' conscience of each man, with the sternest insistence that without dependence on the life of man, as embodied in the organism of society, the individual's ideals are worthless."⁴ So far, however, this may seem to be merely a clear statement of the *desideratum*. What is the nature of the moral ideal that is to accomplish this result, and what the source of its validity? This question Royce discusses at length in his *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*. He shows the impossibility of getting any moral ideal by simply observing the facts of nature, finding the drift of things, and calling that good. To attempt to found morality on evolution is to confuse the notion of evolution with the notion of progress; of growth in complexity and definiteness with growth in moral worth.⁵ One can only give moral approval to a natural tendency on the basis of a moral code found independently of that tendency. On the other hand, if one seek the moral ideal through an appeal to conscience, viewed as a sort of inner light or higher instinct, one finds, alas, so many different

³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵ *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, 1885, p. 27.

and conflicting ideals seeking support in this way. And who is to judge between them? The appeal to sympathy fares no better, for it is confused, often capricious, and not infrequently a disguised form of selfishness. And, in any case, a code thus founded is unable to defend its claims when confronted with the ideal of the unsympathetic individual.

The result would seem to be purely skeptical. No adequate reason can be given for the choice of any ideal. One asks for reasons and gets enthusiasm, rhetoric,—and abuse. But serious ethical skepticism is no mere indolent acquiescence in human ignorance. If one is really in doubt as to which of conflicting ends should be adopted, it is because each makes its own appeal, and one is provisionally accepting both. Make such skepticism as complete as you please, it would still presuppose one end, namely, the “effort to harmonize in one moment all the conflicting aims in the world of life.”⁶

This result is neither barren nor self-contradictory. Such perfect harmony is indeed unattainable. But one can nevertheless walk in the light of this ideal. If he does, he will act as one would act who expected to realize in his own person all the consequences of his act, as it affects all his conflicting aims. In other words, the ideal does not bring us forthwith to the desired harmony, nor does it represent that harmony as in some mystical sense now realized. The disease is still there; the conflict of aims is real; but recognizing these aims as my own, I can deal with them, and work for that organization of life in which the harmony is to be found. The ideal sets a limitless task, but at least it defines my aim.

But at this point Professor Royce, of a sudden, makes an extension of this principle which at first sight seems highly questionable. The highest good, he tells us, would be realizable only in case all the conflicting wills in the world realized fully one another, and were brought into con-

⁶ *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, 1885, p. 138.

formity to this insight. "For, then, not abandoning each its own aim, each would have added thereto, through insight, the aims of the others. And all the world of individuals would act as one Being, having a single Universal Will."⁷

But what is the warrant for this extension? Have we not, in making it, simply become involved in the difficulty which Professor Royce has noted in other efforts to set up an absolute end, namely, that one can meet the recalcitrant individual, who refuses to accept it, only with anathemas, not with compelling argument? I do not find that in this earlier work Professor Royce has met this difficulty. The idealism there expounded does, indeed, represent the individual as a partial and fragmentary embodiment of the universal will and reason. And so, one might argue, if he ever finds himself in his wholeness he will discover at the same time his unity with that universal will. But even if one were to accept this as sound metaphysical doctrine, one might well be left cold, and unconvinced as to its ethical pertinence, and even rebellious. The more red-blooded he were the more likely he would be to retort: "After all, God's business is God's business. My ideals, as mine, are inevitably bound up with my own individual life in all its uniqueness and finitude."

There is here clearly, I think, a gap in the argument, and the whole of Royce's subsequent work might, in one aspect, be viewed as an attempt to bridge this gap. In metaphysics, this appears in his interest in the problem of the individual, and his concern in his later works to find in the world of the absolute elbow-room for the individual; and also in his investigations of the nature of the social consciousness. The results to which years of reflection on these problems brought him are most clearly formulated in the *Problem of Christianity*. Here he shows that the isolated individual is a pure abstraction; that it is not true that one takes one's start, as it were, in the prison of the inner

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

life, and then argues oneself into the belief in other minds on the basis of analogy, finding the behavior of their bodies like that of one's own, and inferring the presence of a corresponding consciousness. The notion of a self-contained mind, coming to believe in the existence of other minds in such fashion, is a pure fiction. We cannot even state the argument from analogy without presupposing as its own terms a consciousness that takes us beyond the limits of our private personality. Our consciousness is in truth from the first social. And one "rounds to a separate mind" only by defining his own interests and purposes within the unity of the mind of the community. Consequently truth-seeking itself, and every form of purposeful activity, is from the first a social enterprise.

It is this insight that bridges the gap noted in the earlier work, and justifies the interpretation there given of the moral ideal. For it makes it plain that the realization of that harmony of my own individual aims which I seek is only possible in so far as I am a member of a community in which is realized the more comprehensive harmony of the conflicting wills of men through the organization of the larger life of mankind; and that I can do my part in the service of this cause only in so far as the spirit of the community dwells within me. From one point of view, this ideal describes an infinitely distant goal,—"the hope of the great community,"—but from another it appears, in moments of moral insight, as precisely the light that is the life of my present endeavors, and gives them form and direction.⁸

The moral insight, then, involves the will to harmonize all the conflicting wills there are in the world, and to this end demands that one act as if one's neighbor and oneself were "one being that possessed at once the aims of both,"⁹

⁸ This is, I take it, the meaning of the interpretation which Royce gives of the essential message of Christianity in the *Problem of Christianity*, that one is saved, made morally whole, through the "indwelling of the spirit of the beloved community."

⁹ *Religious Aspect of Philosophy*, p. 169.

and that one further extend this principle to include the life of all whose aims one realizes; and it involves the will to work for that organization of life in a future and happier humanity where each shall be able to perform his daily task in the service and under the inspiration of this over-individual cause. Although we can not now foresee what such a complete organization of life would be, we do, even now, enjoy certain activities, such as the work of the artist, the scientist, the public-spirited citizen, which illustrate such whole-hearted devotion to an over-individual good, and give more concrete meaning to the formula.

Moreover, our ideal does not simply state generalities. It very definitely determines what our attitude should be in all our social intercourse. For it demands that one realize, as far as may be possible, the true inner life of one's fellow men. Most of the persons with whom we come in contact in our daily lives we meet in a purely external fashion,—our grocer, our tailor, the conductor on the car, and even our more familiar associates. They behave in certain ways, agreeable or disagreeable, and we like or dislike them accordingly. But for the most part we have no true realization of their inner lives at all. It is only in the case of those nearest and dearest to us that we succeed, and then only imperfectly, in taking such an over-personal view as to realize their aims, even as we do our own, and consciously seek to bring them into harmony. Yet bitternesses, jealousies, and hatreds will persist until this spirit can prevail in all our human relations. Work then for the extension of the moral insight in yourself, and among your fellow men. This ideal is absolute. But if one now is confronted with any specific practical problem, individual or social,—shall I do this thing, or advocate that cause?—one may and must, if a moral issue is involved, ask, will it further or hinder the growth of this moral insight? But in most cases there is room for an honest difference of opinion. One may be mistaken. And the test, the only test, is the appeal to experience. The ideal furnishes a standard, but in the use of this standard in concrete sit-

uations the personal equation cannot be escaped, and the limitations of knowledge make mistakes inevitable. Our absolute idealist is modest, if he understands the meaning of his idealism.

The moral ideal that we are here describing might be called the spirit of fair play as between the conflicting wills of men. This does not mean that he who upholds it is an advocate of compromise. Right is right; wrong, wrong. And he has in his vision of the ideal, in his moral insight, a sure criterion. But concrete cases are complex and baffling. The issue is rarely clear cut. So, while he will strenuously work for the triumph of what seems to him best, he will scorn a victory won by compulsion, or by any unfair advantage.

There is only one thing which he absolutely knows is always and everywhere wrong, and which he will therefore oppose, if need be, with all the force at his command; and that is, the action or policy of anyone, individual or nation, which by ruthless egotism seeks to enforce its private will on others, and thereby strikes a blow at the very root of morality itself.

In the *Philosophy of Loyalty* Professor Royce has given a fuller exposition of this moral ideal, and has shown the way in which it underlies and determines reason as well as conduct. It is a "cause" which unites the lives of various human beings in one life. And loyalty, which is the "willing and practical and thorough-going devotion of a person to a cause" is the essence of virtue. And it is such just because it lifts one out of one's private and egotistical self into the unity of the larger life of the community.

Royce has, in his various writings, made many applications of his moral ideal to the practical problems of the day. I shall confine myself to the consideration of two of these. The first is the question of the relation of superior to inferior races, which he discusses in his essay on "Race Questions and Prejudices."¹⁰ The difficulties we have in

¹⁰ In *Race Questions and Other American Problems*, 1908.

dealing with our negro problem will never be solved, he holds, so long as the "superior" white man parades his superiority, thus humiliating the "inferior," and tries to coerce him into decent behavior. Make real to yourself his own inner life as it is to him, give him his share of work to do in the service of law and order, and thus awaken his self-respect, and enable him to become a loyal servant of the community, and then the problem will be solved. That this is no visionary ideal Royce was convinced by the fact that this was just what had taken place in the English West Indian colonies, notably in Jamaica, and that, in consequence, the race problem never had arisen there. The genius that dominated England's policy with respect to her colonies was just that spirit of fair play that rules in her sports. And, one may add, she is now reaping her reward, in the way in which her colonies have rallied to her defence in the present crisis, showing that the empire had become in truth a community of nations.¹¹

Professor Royce was in California when the war broke out, preparing to give a series of lectures on some of the problems raised in his then just published work on *The Problem of Christianity*. He at once changed his plan, and decided to lecture instead on the application of his ethical principle to the great problems brought to the front by the world crisis. His little book, *War and Insurance*, was the result. More important than the simple remedy there suggested,—the extension of the principle of insurance to international relations,—is the clear vision it contains of the community of nations, and of what its realization implies; which is simply, the extension of the moral insight, the spirit of fair play, which should govern our relations as human beings, to the relations between nations.

As the months went by, and the awful tragedy of the war grew ever more appalling, it seemed to Royce increasingly evident that Germany was playing the rôle of the enemy of

¹¹ For example, the small island of Jamaica at the outbreak of the war at once contributed \$2,000,000, and 10,000 soldiers, and then set about it to raise another 10,000.

mankind. The sinking of the *Lusitania* was the crowning proof. After that it was "as impossible for any reasonable man to be in his heart and mind neutral as it was for the good cherubs in Heaven to remain neutral when they first looked out from their rosy, glowing clouds and saw the angels fall. Neutral in heart or mind the dutiful American . . . will not and cannot be. He must take sides."¹² "Our duty is to be and to remain the outspoken moral opponents of the present German policy, and of the German state so long as it holds to this policy and carries on its present war. In the service of mankind we owe an unswerving sympathy, not to one or another, but to all the allied enemies of Germany."¹³

Throughout the last two years of his life Professor Royce lived constantly under the shadow of this world tragedy. It was, as he viewed it, the supreme test of modern civilization. The moral ideal which Western civilization had, after long centuries of travail, brought to birth was fighting for its existence. Militant Germany of to-day, egotistic and ruthless, as her deeds and the utterances of her spokesmen alike proclaimed, had shown herself the enemy "of all that makes the common life of humanity a possible ideal."¹⁴ The call to Americans was plain. As we value that moral ideal which underlies the cause of freedom, so must we be ready to hazard all, not for the sake of America solely, or of any nation, but for the sake of that "truer union of mankind, and for the future of human brotherhood."¹⁵

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¹² From the *Lusitania* address, delivered at Tremont Temple, Boston, on January 30, 1916, and since published in *The Hope of the Great Community*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ From a second *Lusitania* address delivered on the anniversary of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, and since published in *The Hope of the Great Community*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*